

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND NEED – SEA GRANT REAUTHORIZATION

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The National Sea Grant College Program Act was first enacted in 1966 and has been amended nine times, most recently in 2002. The Act authorizes the National Sea Grant College Program (Sea Grant) to promote research, education, training, and advisory service activities to increase the understanding, assessment, development, utilization, and conservation of the Nation's ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources. Sea Grant consists of state Sea Grant programs which comprise a national Sea Grant network, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Sea Grant Office, and the National Sea Grant Review Panel (a Federal Advisory Committee).

The primary purpose of this bill is to reauthorize the National Sea Grant College Program. This bill proposes changes to the legislation that will advance Sea Grant's capability to address regional and national issues, enhance NOAA's ability to administer and provide guidance to the program, and redefine the role of the National Sea Grant Review Panel.

### **Advancing Sea Grant's Capacity for Regional and National Leadership**

Since its inception, Sea Grant has been highly successful at addressing national issues at the local level. The *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, recognizing that many of our nation's most compelling ocean and coastal issues are most effectively addressed regionally, has established regional collaboration as one of three near-term priorities, and NOAA is strengthening its ability to coordinate its activities regionally. The interagency Subcommittee on Integrated Management of Ocean Resources' 2006 work plan called for Sea Grant to facilitate regional science planning to support regional management activities. Sea Grant responded by taking a leadership role in the development of regional plans, expected to be completed in FY 2009. The U.S. Ocean Commission also highlighted Sea Grant's potential for carrying out regional science and information tasks, but with this caveat, "the Sea Grant program would need to find a mechanism to transcend state and local interests." Several changes are proposed in this bill that will strengthen Sea Grant's capacity to work regionally and nationally:

- The proposed legislation supports implementation of Sea Grant's regional plans and the recently completed national plan, *Charting the Course for Ocean Science in the United States in the Next Decade: An Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy*. The series of specific authorizations in the current legislation (invasives, oysters, etc.; 33 U.S.C. § 1131(a)(2)) are replaced by a general authorization for regional and national activities. The bill would also expand Sea Grant's existing authority to support state partners to include support for potential Federal collaborators if appropriate to facilitate regional or national partnerships.
- The *National Sea Grant College Program Act Amendments of 2002* (P.L. 107-299) added a requirement that state programs be rated based on their relative performance (33 U.S.C. § 1123(d)(3)(A)) and any new funding for existing programs be awarded based on those ratings (33 U.S.C. § 1131(c)). While the intent was to provide a competitive opportunity for individual programs to receive additional funding based on merit, the National Research Council's 2006 report, "*Evaluation of the Sea Grant Program Review Process*," pointed out

that, as an unintended consequence, the 2002 amendment also created a financial disincentive for programs to work cooperatively and to form regional partnerships with each other. The proposed legislation retains the requirement to evaluate and assess the performance of state Sea Grant programs, but removes the relative ranking requirement in order to facilitate the development of regional collaborations among the Sea Grant programs.

- The current legislation provides that up to 1 percent of Sea Grant's appropriation may be awarded without match (33 U.S.C. § 1124(b)). These unmatched funds have been used to support national facilities (e.g. National Sea Grant Library, National Media Center, national education web portal), conferences, and other small program development and rapid response activities where a match would not be appropriate. This relatively small pool of funds is no longer adequate to meet the need for continued investment in national activities. In addition, the current legislation is not consistent in its treatment of the national Dean John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship program, requiring matching funds only for Legislative Knauss Fellowships. The proposed legislation increases the percentage of the appropriation that can be awarded without matching funds from 1 to 5 percent and exempts all Knauss Fellowship awards from the matching requirement.

### **Enhancing NOAA's Oversight of the Sea Grant Program**

Staffing in NOAA's National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) is about half what it was 15 years ago despite the expansion of the network of Sea Grant Programs. The 2006 National Research Council report found that "the NSGO does not currently play a sufficient role in ongoing program assistance, monitoring, communication, and assessment" and recommended that the Secretary of Commerce "take steps to ensure that sufficient human and fiscal resources are available to allow robust, ongoing and meaningful interaction" among the NSGO, the state programs, and their home institutions. The proposed legislation increases the percentage of the appropriation that can be spent by NOAA to administer Sea Grant from 5 to 7 percent, which will allow for approximately 8-10 additional full-time employees to enhance NOAA's capability to oversee the Sea Grant program.

### **Transforming the National Sea Grant Review Panel into a National Advisory Board**

The National Sea Grant Review Panel (Panel) was established in 1976 to provide advice on all applications submitted to Sea Grant for funding, on the Sea Grant fellowship program, on the designation and operation of sea grant colleges, and on the development and application of planning guidelines and priorities. Over the past 30 years, the legislative language has stayed the same while the role of the Panel has evolved. The Panel no longer reviews funding or fellowship applications, and with the Sea Grant network almost complete, the designation of new sea grant colleges happens rarely. The 2006 National Research Council report called for the Panel to be "better positioned to comment on issues of broader significance to the overall program" and stated the Panel's sole function should be "to promote the effectiveness of the program as a whole." The proposed legislation supports this transformation of the Panel by focusing its duties on providing strategic advice regarding the national program. This change in focus is reflected in changing the name of the body to the National Sea Grant Advisory Board (Board). The Board will report every four years to Congress and the Administration on the "State of Sea Grant."